

“When That Which Is Perfect ...”

“... is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man I have put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:10f)

No little discussion has transpired regarding *“that which is perfect”* in this reading. The importance of learning to what (or whom) the apostle refers is important because the cessation of tongues and prophecies are linked to the arrival of *“that which is perfect.”* There are two different positions which identify what *“that which is perfect.”* On one hand some understand the apostle to be referring to Christ and His second advent by the words *“when that which is perfect is come.”* This school of thought, whether intentionally or unintentionally, allows the conclusion that spiritual gifts, including prophecies, wisdom, faith, and tongues to continue through the church age, ceasing only when Jesus comes to receive His bride unto Himself. A second position on *“that which is perfect”* is that the statement referred to complete, perfected revelation. The implication from this position is that when God completed His revelation to man, supernatural gifts ceased. Let us examine both views.

There is no argument that Christ is perfect. That word is used of His work and priesthood a number of times, particularly in Hebrews (5:9). The question must be, does Paul refer to Christ with his statement *“when that which is perfect”*? Some argue that it is not for were that so, the writer would have written *“when he who is perfect is come”* but advocates of the first position seek to defend their argument against that conclusion by offering counter claims. I believe the only real way to determine what the apostle alludes to is, as is true with almost all disputed passages, the setting and context of the statement.

First, the apostle speaks of something which is *“in part;”* then something which is *“perfect.”* These two items partake of the same nature; knowledge in part, knowledge which is complete. To regard Christ as the *“perfect”* is to alter the items of the same nature.

Moreover, the apostle’s two illustrations of things in part versus that which is perfect is designed to show that he was discussing two things of like nature. Consider his first *“when I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child, now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things.”* A child and a man are of like nature, but a child illustrates the immature state (things in part); a man stands for the mature state (that which is perfect). His second illustration *“now we see through a mirror*

darkly, but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). Again the apostle discusses two things of like nature: looking through a mirror darkly (things in part); the other is plain and clear (seeing face to face). The context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 bears out the fact that the apostle is contrasting imperfect knowledge (things in part) with perfect knowledge (that which is perfect). Christ is perfect, but it is not of Him Paul alludes when he wrote, *"What that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away."*

Do we have "perfect knowledge" today? If we view that from what man has learned of God's revelation the answer must be "No." But, if by "perfect knowledge" we are considering that which God has provided for our knowledge, benefit and growth, the answer must be "Yes". *"... His divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness"* (2 Pet. 1:3). *"Every scriptures inspired of God is profitable...that the man of God may be perfect furnished completely unto every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). *"These things I have in a figure transferred unto myself and Apollos for your sakes that in us ye might learn not to go beyond that which is written"* (1 Cor. 4:6). *"Whoso goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God ..."* (2 John 9).

In a nutshell, if spiritual gifts (knowledge, tongues, wisdom) exist today, the Bible is not perfect, not a complete revelation. But, if the Bible is all we need, then spiritual gifts have ceased. It is that simple.

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